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## Training women entrepreneurs in rural Asia

**S**kill building and a supportive policy environment are essential for women in rural areas to become successful entrepreneurs and contribute to a dynamic rural economy. This was the conclusion of the 25 participants from 10 countries who successfully completed the recent training course on Entrepreneurship Development for Rural Women, 20–28 May 2012, organized by the APO in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration in Bogor, Indonesia. The participants noted that harnessing the entrepreneurial talents of women was an effective strategy to fight unemployment and poverty in rural areas. With training in production/processing technologies and marketing tools, they can take advantage of abundant local agricultural raw materials to create value-added products, possibly creating new consumer demand.



*Saima Amjad receiving a reward as outstanding participant in this course from Dr. Edi Abdurachman, Executive Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Indonesia. Chief Resource Person Reuel Virtucio looks on.*

Dr. Edi Abdurachman, Executive Secretary of the Agency for Agricultural Extension and Human Resources Development, Ministry of Agriculture of Indonesia, explained that, “People in rural areas, especially women, need to learn about tools and techniques for starting and running a business, and training like this organized by the APO is very important.” Program Development Manager Stephanie D.Y. Tiapco of the Philippines Center for Entrepreneurship Foundation, Inc., one of the resource persons, agreed with that view and believed that, “Without the necessary skills to manage an enterprise, rural women resort to ‘feminized’ microbusinesses using manual work, and since they have no legal recognition as owners of resources, they cannot have access to credit and institutional support of government.”

APO Agriculture Department Director J. Bernardo noted that, “At a time when we hear of retrenchment of workers in factories due to economic downturns in markets in Europe and the USA, the first to go are women casual workers. A World Bank study noted that 50–70% of temporary workers are women, whereas permanent workers are mostly men. It is therefore crucial that we find a way to draw more women into entrepreneurship so we can reduce the number of women wage workers who are highly vulnerable to retrenchments.”

Participants were inspired by their visits to two companies: PT. Mustika Ratu in Taman Sari, and P.O. Diana Hermawati in Gunung Sindur, Bogor. Both were started by women entrepreneurs following two different business models. PT. Mustika Ratu started as a small home-based enterprise producing herbal products and traditional cosmetics from indigenous herbs and natural ingredients and eventually expanded into a national brand and the leader in the industry in Indonesia. The company is now exporting and opening franchises for its products in other countries. On the other hand, P.O. Diana, which started only in 2007, produces various health food and wellness products using wild horse milk and organic honey as basic raw ingredients. After barely four years of inhouse research and product development, the home-based enterprise now has 15 product lines, engages 10 employees, and provides a steady market for 100 farmers in a cooperative in West Nusa Tenggara province.

Participants recommended that the APO continue this type of training for women, especially for trainers. Trained women in Asia can establish networks to learn from each other and pass the knowledge along to colleagues and clients through counseling and mentoring sessions. This kind of project, they said, would help a lot in creating a critical mass of trainers and facilitators who work with women, especially in rural areas.